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WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING

HIS OPINIONS, GENIUS AND CHARACTER

A DISCOURSE

GIVEN AT NEWPORT, R. I., ON THE CELEBRATION OF THE CENTENARY OF HIS BIRTH, APRIL 7, 1880

BY

HENRY W. BELLOWS

NEW YORK
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
182 FIFTH AVENUE
1880

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9 April, 1892.

The Gift of

JOHN H. MORISON, D.D.

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"THE greatest minds admit no biography. They are determined from within. Their works spring from unfathomed depths in their own souls, from silent, secret thoughts, inquisitions, aspirations, which come they know not whence, go they know not whither."—*From a letter of Channing's, dated Boston, May 4th,* 1838, vol. i., p. 350 *of Channing's Memoirs.*

Inscriptions on Channing's monument at Mount Auburn, Cambridge, Mass.:

On one side:

Here rest the remains of
WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING,
Born, 7 April, 1780,
at Newport, R. I.;
Ordained, 1 June, 1803,
as a minister of Jesus Christ to the Society, worshipping God in Federal St., Boston:
Died 2 October, 1842,
while on a journey, at Bennington, Vermont.

On the other side:

In memory of
WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING,
Honored throughout Christendom, for his eloquence and courage in maintaining and advancing
the Great Cause of
Truth, Religion and Human Freedom,
this monument
is gratefully and reverently erected
by the Christian Society,
of which during nearly forty years
he was Pastor.

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DISCOURSE.

"He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light."—JOHN, v. 35.

IT was when John the Baptist's light was fading in the glory of the newly-risen Sun of Righteousness, that Jesus bore this generous testimony to his predecessor's lustre. He characterized, in words that have become immortal, the flame of that stern prophet who had heralded the way for his own appearing; but at the same time intimated that its fires had paled, like a torch whose oil had burned low. The sun had risen, the torch was no longer useful.

We have come together to bless and praise a modern prophet, who, like many other saints who have been the burning and shining lights of their generation, was the herald of a new and brighter day. But it is not his memory chiefly that we recall. It is a living light that we are to contemplate, brighter than it ever was; it is not a torch that has gone out, but a star that shines on, guiding our present way, that we meet to rejoice in the light of. Of Channing we do not say he *was*, but he *is* a burning and a shining light, and the season has not gone by, it has not even reached its meridian, when the Church and the world are willing to rejoice in his light.

On this occasion, the centennial of his birth, and in the place of his birth, it falls to me to be the spokesman of the love and honor in which his life and teachings, his character and his services to the Church and the world are held by his townsmen, and especially by those who have inherited, and have sought to extend and perpetuate what was special in his theological opinions. It is true his birth-place was not the principal seat of his life and labors, and it is still more true that

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no sect or denomination has any exclusive right in his fame. He belonged to the order of Christians called Unitarians, but he belonged still more to the Church Universal, and nothing would have grieved him more than any attempt to shut him in to any inclosure that shuts out the pure and good of any name, Catholic or Protestant, Trinitarian or Unitarian. His theological opinions, in my judgment, upon a very recent careful reconsideration of them, prove much more systematic, definite and positive than it is common to allow; but they are also much more comprehensive, inclusive, and inconsistent with the sectarian spirit or form than they are sometimes assumed to be. They are profoundly conservative and profoundly radical, holding on to all that is eternal, going down to all that is eternal, and going on to all that is eternal. In the strength of his moral intuitions and convictions, and without anticipating many results of later criticism, or using the methods which a larger learning has employed, he simply ignored and set aside all that hampered his full intellectual and moral freedom, and slowly evolved a system of religious thought, which has recommended itself more and more to spiritual minds in all branches of the Church, and in all Christian countries—a system so profound, simple and lofty, so humane and natural, and yet so Christ-like and divine, that it lacks dogmatic and ecclesiastical features almost as much as the Sermon on the Mount, or the personal teachings of the Saviour; enters almost as little into scholastic and technical questions, and avoids, by reducing to their proper insignificance, most of the sectarian disputes of the Church.

Channing was a theologian, but not of the old pattern. He studied God and reported his ways and his will after a manner that had not been recognized in former schools of theology. This indeed was his chief service, that he broke with the old theological methods, and refused to settle the controversies of the Church by an appeal to scriptures and creeds, authoritative *over* the mind and heart of man, and not merely authoritative *within* them, and by concurrence with their testimony. He was fully convinced that the prevailing system of dog-

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matic and ecclesiastical Christianity—essentially the same in the Romish and the Protestant Historical Church—was contrary to the teaching of the spirit of Christ—contrary to the light of natural reason and conscience (which indeed has been offered as the proof of its divinity and of man's total corruption), and that the power of the Gospel could be restored only by returning to Jesus' method of teaching it, a method that respected, honored, and relied upon man's essential relations to God, instituted in his rational and moral constitution.

Channing recognized no theology based upon a revelation which by interpretation separated Christianity from the general history of humanity, and placed it, and must ever keep it, in antagonism to Philosophy and Life. He did not consider theology as the study of God, within the covers of the Bible, as if that were a book foreign to human intelligence, and altogether above and aside from it. He resisted stoutly, from the irrepressible freedom of his own soul, all *compulsory* allegiance to the Church, to the creeds, to the past, to Jesus, nay to God himself, and strove to emancipate all other souls from this prostration before mere power and authority. It was not necessary to bind him with cords to the altar, if the Being worshiped there was entitled, as he thought he was, by his holiness, justice, and goodness, to the sacrifice of his heart. Freely, joyfully, humbly, and with his whole soul he bowed before truth, worth, goodness, purity, sacredness, and in the testimonies of his own spiritual nature he saw them, to an infinite extent, in the Great Source of his own moral experiences. But not one joint would he bend before the threats of mere power, or the assumptions of an authority not guaranteed by his rational and moral nature.

We are not left to speculate about his fundamental ideas. They are not only given with transparent simplicity and unfaltering courage, and with a reiteration that to many is wearisome in his collected writings; but he has prefaced his own works, almost at the conclusion of his life, with a deliberate statement, in which he distinctly, and with the most

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solemn emphasis calls attention to the two ideas which he wishes to be regarded as the dominant notes and the master-keys of his whole system of religious and political thinking and feeling. One is unqualified reverence for human nature; the other, boundless faith in freedom. They are easily interchangeable, and become in his writings one and the same. Human nature is worthy of unspeakable, immeasurable reverence, because God informs it; because it reveals God; because reason is the intellectual life of God and man, and conscience the moral life of God, which he dignified man by inviting him to share. Man knows God only because he is made in his rational and moral image. God is as much dependent upon our moral and rational powers for worship, communion and filial love, as we are dependent on his holiness and loveliness and paternal character for an object which is truly adorable. And our intellectual and moral powers owe their worth, their development and their glory to freedom. This is God's own everlasting glory and life—freedom. Were he not free in his holiness, his goodness, his thoughts, he could not command the love and reverence of free beings; and were they not free to offer him a voluntary, a rational, moral homage, their worship would be mechanical and worthless. Civilization is nothing but the triumph of freedom, and that is the victory of Reason and Conscience. Unreason—the fruit of self-will, ignorance, passion, prejudice—shows itself in barbarisms of a more or less atrocious kind; and society, even now, in its least deplorable forms, is irrational and barbaric. It is not yet based upon, and is not characteristically conducted in reverence for Reason; but rests still on force, on cupidity, on fear. Governments are not strong where they should be strong, in their reliance on what is true and right, but in their appeal to party passion, the love of power and national animosities. Mankind do not glory in their nature as rational and moral, but in its external circumstances. They build up artificial distinctions of condition and caste; they glory in luxury and ostentation; they belittle themselves with cos-

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tume and equipage and titles and state. And if Reason, in the occasional form of triumphant logic or vigorous literature, obtains respect, it is often in disregard of the only element that makes Reason wholly worthy of reverence—its subordination to Conscience. Can that state of society be regarded as in any but an inchoate condition, in which the quality that alone makes God godlike or venerable is made secondary and subordinate, and that by an immense and all-characterizing step, to what is convenient, pleasant, favorable to immediate interests, or flattering to mean and interested desires? Where is the city or community in which the right and the good are enshrined in the inmost heart; governing respect and affection, deciding social station, making and executing the laws? If God be moral perfection, must he not expect and demand that the Race made in his image should be aiming steadily to make justice and goodness prevail and reflect his holiness? But this justice and goodness cannot be *forced.* They perish and discharge themselves of their essence when in bondage or under force. Hence in Channing's eyes any state of commotion, revolution or contention was preferable to intellectual formalism and compulsory decorum. No atheistic or infidel opinions were so much to be dreaded as a compulsory formalism of creed. That was the smothering of the rational and moral nature. Free, it might wander, but it would learn by its wanderings, and at any rate keep itself alive by its motion, and might some day return. But slavery of the will was moral death.

The exalted view of human nature, which Channing had, was not only not opposed, but it grew out of his sublime sense of the greatness and glory of God. Man learned God's Being and his moral and rational attributes from the constitution of his own soul, not from external nature. This was the chief glory of man's own spirit, that it revealed an Infinite Spirit! Self-reverence was only the reflection of the awe which God's holiness or moral grandeur kindled in a being who found himself capable of recognizing the Divine

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existence and character, by the mysterious power of reason and conscience, which at once made him a partaker in the Divine nature, and were the only instruments of his faith and worship. That *mind is one and the same essence in God, angels and men*, is a fundamental postulate with him. That the finite mind is of the nature and essence of the Infinite Mind, he everywhere assumes as the very first condition of all knowledge of God or intercourse with him. The later or more modern difficulties which have arisen from the recognition of the limitation of the finite as vitiating all assumed knowledge of the Infinite, he not only does not recognize, but his faith, his character, his service to humanity, are due to the utter freedom of his soul from this most fatal and ultimate form of skepticism. That the finite was cut off from the Infinite by its conditions was to him a proposition as meaningless as that the bay was cut off from the ocean, or could have no communication with the ocean, because it was a bay and not the ocean itself. The human soul was open to God, who flowed into it in man's rational and moral nature; and more and more, as the moral and rational nature grew, expanded and became capable of receiving it. There was no pantheism in this sentiment of God's presence in man, for that involves a notion against which Channing's whole nature revolted—the notion that man loses himself by admitting God into his soul. According to him man is freer the more nearly he approaches, the more truly he is possessed by the Infinite Freedom. It is only in freedom, in the exercise of an unenslaved will, that man can form any true conception of God, who is freedom itself. But it is the glory of God that his freedom is the freedom of his own *will;* and *will* exists, and can exist, only in a Person. God is a Person, and as a person cannot be confused or confounded with other persons. Man is a person—tending, however, by his weakness of will to degenerate into a thing. This indeed is the radical evil of sin. It tends to fall, nay it is itself a fall from that sense of moral freedom without which moral obedience

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cannot be rendered. The more man becomes like his Maker the more truly he is a Person; and God's personality lies in essence, in the fact that his truth and goodness are always matters of choice, while his choice is always truth and goodness. Nothing could have been more dreadful to Channing than the idea of a God who was only the name for inexorable laws, infinite but blind forces, without self-consciousness, without freedom, without feeling, and that men were free only by feigning freedom, or ignoring the bonds that hold them fast in a fatal necessity. Channing's sense of God's goodness and holiness were so utterly dependent on his sense of his freedom that it became impossible for him to think God pleased with any bondage in his children, or any dominion of fear in their worship and service. As God was free, so his children, to know and love and worship him, must be free also: free to think, free to act, free to worship. This made him the life-long foe of all systems of government in state, or church, whose essence was conformity; the suppression of free thought, free worship, free will. He dreaded the effort to overawe the individual soul by the weight and pressure of numbers; to confine the present within the limits of the past; to quote stale precedents against fresh inspirations; to discourage new hopes by instancing old failures; to limit and stereotype the creeds. He had a boundless faith in God's great and good intentions toward the human race; the infinite love of an Infinite Person—owing his own rational and moral glory to his character and his freedom—toward his human offspring, who were to be made great and glorious after his own pattern, by becoming continually more free and more reverent of others' freedom; more just and loving more to be just; more obedient and more willing in their obedience; more his children and more themselves at the same time. This is the key to the ideality, the moral enthusiasm, the hopefulness of Channing's faith. No one had a keener, deeper sense of individual or social imperfection, folly and sin than he. His censures, his groans, his yearnings over

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the inadequate attainments, the low standards, the dull feelings of his fellow creatures; his inexorable determination to accept no excuses or apologies in place of repentance and newness of life; his severe demands on himself; his tonic remonstrances with the shortcomings of his best friends; his jealousy of any praise of himself or his doings; his arraignment of immoral but commanding characters worshiped by the world about him; of the shallow respectability that mistook itself for morality; of the traditional acquiescence that called itself faith; of the love of freedom that co-existed with the allowance of domestic slavery in his own country; of the business cupidity that covered itself with the name of enterprise and public spirit; of the faith in free thought that allowed the prejudices or even the just prepossessions of numbers, to persecute individual peculiarity or even eccentricity of opinion; all this habitual censoriousness or exactingness was nothing but the reverse side of the immense confidence he had in human possibilities, based upon the relations man bore, in his very nature, to a God whose powers, whose love, whose benignity toward man were bounded only by his Divine purpose of keeping man's *manhood* in him, and never allowing him, either as a race or an individual, to be content or satisfied in any state of life or happiness short of the truly human. Men sometimes talk of Channing's ignorance of the necessary conditions of human life, of his secluded separateness from the world; of his imperfect acquaintance with the pressure of material necessities, the spring of animal passions and appetites; the necessary preoccupation of the masses of men and women with immediate things. He seems almost like an anchorite, a hermit, a pillar-saint in the fewness of his wants, the wonder he expresses at the low pleasures men find so attractive, and in the monotonous concentration of his thoughts upon the moral and the spiritual. But the truth is, it was not that Channing did not see all this; but that, seeing it, he saw what is still more real and vastly more powerful and inviting: he saw *God*, and saw man's likeness to him and

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his capacity for realizing it, and saw that men mostly did *not* see it, and that it was his office and privilege to draw their attention to it with all urgency. Nobody ever lived since Jesus who recognized the evil in men and the world with a deeper, tenderer sorrow, and still retained so perfect a possession and enjoyment of his own faith and hope, for man and society, in God and his gracious purposes. There is no despondency in his complaints, no disrespect in his upbraidings, nay, no impatience in his enthusiasm. He had more than the optimist's content. His confidence is not in powers he does not know—in a God he blindly trusts—in purposes he cannot sympathize with! He has grasped the nature of the Divine method, apprehends its implements, uses them, and knows their temper and edge. It is because mind is at work, and is a Divine instrument; because truth and justice exist in perfection in God, and are revealed in man's conscience; because love is almighty, and has its delegates in human hearts; that he expects results from civilization, and a stage of progress that will make our present state appear barbarous; and that he appeals so urgently, so boldly, so pleadingly to men to keep the weapons of the Divine armory open to their use, and make successful war on the lusts, the ignorance, the moral sloth, the dull content that belate the spring of Heaven on earth, and perpetuate the winter of human discontent. If other human spirits had seen the vision of God's powers and promises in the human soul, and its latent capacities, as Channing saw them, he would never have seemed visionary and extravagant. It was the glory of this burning and shining light, that the fogs of our fleshly and self-indulgent civilization—built on the urgency of what is animal and superficial—did not quench its own exalted beams. Channing was an idealist in essence. The ideal was for him the only real, and he treated it as such. So did his Master before him; so have all the prophets, and so must all those do who have the heavenly vision of God in their eyes. It is not they who are fanatics and dreamers, but we who are asleep, or with only one eye yet open. They see and

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know what man is, and can prove himself to be, if he will—because he is the child of God by a real spiritual generation, and has his Father's attributes at his command; can claim and exercise his moral freedom and his rational nature. They see and know that it is nothing new and strange that is wanted to regenerate the world; only more of a kind they already have and know; more of the truly human yet divine sentiment of justice and love. Given a million hearts and minds, a million wills like Channing's—nay, like any humble, loving, holy follower of Jesus—and instantly an unspeakable regeneration—a descent of the kingdom of God, appears! Things become easy that were before impossible. War, that we cannot kill by force, dies of shame. Selfishness, that we regard as indigenous and indestructible, turns into justice, mercy, and the enjoyment of others' happiness, as the truest extension of our own, and disappears from the world, just as it disappears in every truly regenerate household. All that has ever been realized in any one man is possible in families; all that has ever triumphed in families may triumph in communities. Every true community predicts the universal emancipation of the race; and the race, glorified out of its own nature—which is the gift of God—foretells more and larger and nobler measures of perfectness in the boundless worlds and times yet to be inherited.

With these exalted views of God's freedom, justice, and goodness, as the source and perpetual inspiration and inexhaustible fountain of human powers and hopes—no wonder that Channing had the profoundest and most cheerful faith in the earthly and the celestial destiny of humanity. There was no caprice in the purposes, no limitation in the love, no uncertainty in the direction of the Divine Mind. And equally there was no incapacity to receive God's truth, no constitutional antagonism to it, no essential alienation, no hopeless break with God in human nature—which was indissolubly connected with, and an echo or image of the Divine nature.

The clear and full declaration, or rather illumination, of the essential relations of God and man in Christianity, as

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founded in the oneness of mind and the sovereignty of moral truth, made the Gospel of Christ the joy and confidence of Channing's heart, and secured it the allegiance and devotion of his life. Because Jesus in his own life and character, and by his precepts and parables, made God's truth to be justice and holiness directed by Fatherly love; and man's life to be obedience to truth and duty—which he was not only capable of rendering, but capable of enjoying, and finding to be his chief and permanent bliss; because Jesus made God's Fatherhood and man's sonship correlative, transcendent truths, and illustrated them in his own person and character, Channing fastened his faith and affections upon Christianity as the divinest method of advancing the kingdom of God on earth, and the salvation of man for time and eternity. As he understood or interpreted it, it was in exact accordance with what the highest human thought and feeling would wish it to be, and expect it to be. It met and satisfied his intellect and his conscience. It presented God in the most holy, just, and merciful character. It honored humanity by exhibiting it in the perfect sinlessness and disinterested love and self-sacrifice of Jesus. Its respect for human freedom was complete; its method, not force, but persuasion, example, and light. It made certain the immortality for which humanity had only hoped, and by this assurance gave to man that dignity which only a nature destined to a much fuller unfolding than was yet possible on earth, could possess. It blended morality and piety for the first time in an indissoluble unity. It rebuked worldliness, and humbled the pride of wealth and station, and the worse pride of intellect and self-will. It abased the high and exalted the lowly. It made men brothers by a tie stronger than blood, whether of race or of family. It discountenanced war and violence. It founded its hopes on the triumphs of mind and heart, of moral truth and love, and not on the schools of science and philosophy, not on the sword nor the power of artificial organization. It was the noblest and most exalted honor ever paid to humanity, that God in Christ addressed not its fears, not its passions, not

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its dogmatic hopes, not its national prejudices, but its highest and holiest powers, its reason and its conscience—what is universal, uniting, and elevating—what is godlike and divine—and not what is attractive to self-interest, gratifying to self-importance, flattering to selfish hopes. Christian to the core, Channing had absolutely nothing of the Churchman in him—less possibly than would have been wise—for he held the Church responsible for a great dogmatic and ecclesiastical system, which had buried the simplicity of Christ's Gospel beneath a mass of opinions and customs revolting to his mind and heart. His Christianity was essentially that which fell only from Christ's lips, and was illustrated in his life, before the Apostle to the Gentiles had given it the dogmatic shape of his ingenious intellect, or the powers of the world had seized it to forge from it a new instrument of political order and ambition.

But simple and profoundly rational as Channing's ideas of Christianity were, they were central and commanding, and they were historical and supernatural. For him Jesus was no mythic growth of marvel-loving times; he was no uncommissioned, self-appointed prophet, owing his authority to his greater wisdom and insight. Channing fully believed him to be *sent*, in the ordinary sense of the Church, from heaven—from God's immediate presence. He believed him to have been preexistent. He thought him to owe his sinlessness not simply to his nature, but to his special and personal relations to God—relations which we do not yet fully enjoy. He did not regard him chiefly as an example for us, in his own temptations and trials, because we could not understand his resources nor enter into his experience. But it would not be just to call him an Arian without explanation, for he did not think Christ's nature different from ours, but only the same in a higher stage of development; nor had he any perception or recognition of what has been called the *double* nature of Christ—the Divine and the human. He knew but one form of spiritual nature—God's own. It was mind, and mind was rational and moral. It might have, it did have different

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stages of development. It was eternally perfect in God. It was eternally capable of development in his children. God's glory was eternally to give, and man's eternally to receive it. Jesus Christ had, according to his view, a created existence; but it was older than man's. He brought his moral and spiritual perfections with him. He did not grow into them as we grow, nor were they limited by what hinders us. I am bound, in simplicity, to say, that I do not share these views of Christ's pre-existence, nor is the moral and spiritual exaltation of Jesus in my view dependent upon the place or the date of his first creation; nor do I think that Channing, judging by the views his disciples have since attained, would have continued in them if he had lived to our day. His own spiritual philosophy ought, it seems to me, to have made him of all men, readiest to believe that a being made in the Divine image might, occasionally at least, live in the Divine likeness free from sin; nor can I see what should prevent us from believing that spiritual or moral genius—like intellectual—may be exceptional, without being abnormal. We do not think Homer, Aristotle, Plato, Michael Angelo, Shakespeare, pre-existed, because their genius is unparalleled; why Jesus? Genius, poetic, artistic, executive, is always unaccountable and always exceptional, but it is never other or more than human. I hope and trust that other sinless beings have lived besides Jesus; beings at any rate there have been in whom no sin appeared, and I should hold it a great deduction from my reverence for Christ and humanity if I were compelled to leave Jesus out of the ranks of our common manhood.

But let us not forget that Channing's views about the pre-existence and the miraculous, in which he was a firm believer, and the difference between the origin of Christianity and other religions, only emphasize the pure rationality and ethical and spiritual quality of his characteristic views. Believing in the miracles, he neither magnified them nor rested in them. Believing in the pre-existence, it was not this that gave Christianity its dignity and importance in his eyes,

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and he did not require these opinions from others as a test of their faith. They were not of the essence of his own faith. It was not the mysterious nor the abnormal nor the irrational; not the ontological and metaphysical, nor the supernatural, that he valued. It was what was rational, intelligible, ruleable, imitable. He accepted certain views which we might reject, as being to him most in accord with the record. He held the record in a more literal respect than modern scholars of his general views. But I feel bound to say that none of his views brought him any nearer to the orthodoxy of the visible church, than it did Parker or Martineau; and that those who use him to disfavor free inquiry or to buoy up sinking dogmas, or to stop theological progress, cannot be careful students of his life and writings, and do not illustrate his freedom. He had no such views of the difference between the truly human and the truly Divine as would have made even interesting to him the ordinary empty questions as to how far the same mind can partake the Divine and the human. That question was settled in his fundamental theory of the identity of mind. There was no difference, except in degree of development, between Jesus and other men; as the only difference in nature between God and man is, that God is *eternally father* and man *eternally his child*, by rational and moral generation, or identity of nature and derivation of essence. Channing never permitted theoretical differences to diminish or weaken the significance of moral and spiritual agreements. There is no evidence that he valued anybody more for sharing his views, or depreciated anybody for opposing or denying them if in a good spirit. If he had a choice, it was for the society of those who had some new or divergent view to present. He had a wondrous confidence in the power of truth to protect itself; in the safety of free discussion; and in the possible importance of the new light which even very young and unrecognized spirits might at any time shed upon questions regarded by most as closed and settled. Like the mothers in Israel, who regarded every son as the possible Messiah,

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Channing hailed every independent and earnest mind as the possible opener of some new and wide door into the kingdom of God. He was equally tolerant of others' opinions, and cautious and docile in his own. He thought that new truth was yet to break out of God's Word, and that with new truth would come new means of advancing the delayed triumphs of the Gospel, which were identical with the progress of true civilization.

It is easy to see why, with these views, Channing should be claimed both by conservatives and by radicals in the liberal ranks: and why even enlightened and spiritual believers of the so-called orthodox faiths should be able to cull from his writings passages which savor of the old system. He was no destructive, no despiser of the past; and he retained and breathed all that was sacred and divine in the piety that had been associated with the old opinions. Now and then it is true, as in his famous Baltimore sermon, and in his equally great New York sermon, he made the strongest, most direct and most damaging assaults upon the Trinitarian and Calvinistic systems of opinion—assaults which, for courage, explicitness, and even for offensiveness to the feelings and prejudices of the Christian world, have never been exceeded. But controversy of a textual or ecclesiastical kind was his strange work. He dreaded its effects upon himself and others, and only engaged in it when driven by the stress of his position or by his noble necessity to vindicate the freedom of opinion and the claims to respect of his own beleaguered company of fellow believers. Controversy bears no greater proportion to the affirmative part of his writings, than Jesus' own contradiction of Jewish and Pharisaic errors does to his positive teaching of religious truth. And therefore as Jesus has continued to be honored, loved, and quoted by rationalists and supernaturalists, by Catholics and Protestants, by churchmen and anti-churchmen, by Calvinists and Arminians and Pelagians, because the bulk of his teaching is universal, uncontroversial, and of that spirit and temper which time does not stale, nor place

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color, nor other differences affect; so Channing has been placed by a wide consent in the calendar of the Universal Church—the orthodox Christian world condoning his denial of several of its most generally received opinions, in recollection of the glorious testimony he bore in his writings and his life to the beauty of holiness, the might of divine truth, and the transcendent importance of the Christian life. None have been able to escape the power of his spirituality, the earnestness of his faith, the purity and elevation of his character. It has deodorized his dogmatic offenses, and made his controversial writings forgotten or forgiven by all except those who have nothing to forgive or forget, still thinking them the necessary and invaluable expression of theological conviction, on which his own vital faith and his lofty personal character rested, and in which the Christian world will finally unite and agree.

I have already given more time than I intended to the consideration of Channing as a theologian and the essence of his opinions. Let us now turn to the contemplation of his genius and character; or the measure of the man himself.

In some respects his views, as already set forth, are themselves the best description of the genius and character of the man. Considering the date of his settlement in the Christian ministry, and the prevailing opinions of his contemporaries,—the depth and breadth of his opinions, the freedom of his intellect, and the unconventional, undogmatic and unecclesiastical character of his thoughts, are the indications of a mind of the first order—possessing an authority in the clearness, soberness and calmness of its own vision and its own convictions, that liberates it from local, accidental and merely custom-made bonds. Rarely has any religious thinker appeared who was less obviously the child of his time and circumstances, whether in his opinions, his spirit or his career. He called no man master. The religious views he held were not in accord with those of his kindred; he was not the disciple of the great men nearest to him in his youth, like Dr. Hopkins and Dr. Stiles, whom he greatly

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honored. He was not the echo and representative of the prevailing moderation, and compromised or emasculated orthodoxy, the Arianism or obscurantism of the growing liberalism of his region and time. He was utterly out of sympathy with Priestley and Belsham, though appreciative of the merits of Price, and probably more indebted to Butler than to any single mind. He honored Buckminster, but did not partake the scholastic or highly literary spirit, which in his time was giving to Boston the name of the modern Athens, and was arraying the liberal pulpit in the silken robes of academic culture—the generation of mellifluous pulpit oratory—mild and correct, which Kirkland illustrated and Everett carried to its culminating perfection.

He was not the close friend and companion of the able and cultivated men who made Boston the seat and center of conservatism in everything except theology; in classicism, in oratory, in rhetoric, in taste, in manners; and in theology, the seat of a cautious, ethical or secularized divinity—lukewarm and inoffensive—difficult to define, and impossible to propagate. Himself exquisitely refined, sensitive to beauty and sublimity in nature and in literature; fond of good letters, read in poetry, with a taste for the classics and for the fine arts, the first scholar in his class, and at eighteen the chosen writer of the address with which the students hailed President Adams in his stiff resistance to French policy; with early promise of high success in the legal profession, for which his friends and classmates predestined him, or else for a great political career; he never was the echo or the mouthpiece of the special tendencies or predilections of his day and generation, or of the city where he spent his life. And it was because his impulse came from a higher source than any local or temporary stream. So far as he was not the child of God, he must be pronounced the son of his own genius and not of his time and parentage and neighborhood, his sect or his party. And his genius was one of intense self-possession —making his own thoughts more engrossing and commanding than any thoughts he found in books, or any influences

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that were about him. He found within himself ideas, feelings, faculties, that fastened his attention upon themselves, not as being *his* in the egotistic sense, but as being wonderful suggestions and keys, the sublime representatives of what he shared with Humanity and with God. What he was and saw and felt in his own nature gave him his inspiration, his mission, and his special career. There was nothing indirectly derived, second-hand or traditional, and merely bred of local contagion, in his views or in his methods. He was an original force, commanded by his vision and conviction, and from a height which no fortresses of venerable custom or of elegant prejudice overlooked, much less overawed. More individual than if his individuality had not lacked all egotism and all eccentricity, all caprice and self-allowance; he had little power of co-operation, little faith in organization, and little dependence on others' sympathy and applause, and as little susceptibility to censure. The most sanctified of his clerical contemporaries, he was the least professional in his temper and spirit; the most Christian in his heart and life—the least ecclesiastical. He loved Boston best of all the world—if Newport may not to-day claim the warmest place in his heart —yet he was not a Bostonian in the most characteristic sense of that term. He did not share its distrust for genius untrained in academic lore; its bated breath for new men not baptized into Harvardian waters; its impatience with strength, if it were shaggy and rugged; its marvelous solidity of social conformity, and the breeding in and in of its tastes and convictions. Respectability, good family, self-consistency, decorum, moderation, the lares around that honored hearth, were not his household gods. Far be it from me to disparage the noble self-sufficiency and compact perfectness of the place of my own birth and breeding. But however much it may have been, or may still be deplored, it is due to the right measurement of Channing to say, that he was not the typical Bostonian of his day or of any day, and that what he did in and for Boston was usually against the grain of its characteristic and governing tastes and wishes. He gave his genius

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to Boston and mankind. He did not shape it to suit Boston or his generation, but to satisfy his nature and conscience, and to honor God and his service among men. The same may be said of his great though younger contemporaries, Emerson, Parker, Garrison. It was a fortunate thing for Channing that he was driven to Virginia, the old heart of the country, to earn his independence, and there to settle his opinions and his profession. There, in comparative solitude, and beyond the reach of local influences, and even natal bonds, he found *himself* (not that he had ever wandered), because there, with his manhood just attained, concurred the first great struggle of his mind and heart with its own questions, in a meditative separation from all that could have biased him or warped him from being other or less than himself. True, in that protracted season of profound reverie and meditation, in which his soul was feathering and taking wing and direction, he lost his bodily health permanently. He was adding to his conscientious labor, as a tutor and teacher, the tasks of a profound self-questioner and inquirer of the Spirit of God. He found his soul, and saw the great lines that marked its significance, and indicated his sources of power and usefulness, and fixed his calling and self-dedication to God, and Christ, and humanity; he lost his health, and that finally. It is important to connect the two facts. They are curiously illustrative of the disrespect in which he held all endeavors to associate matter and mind in any close mutual dependency; and he was himself the minimum of body and the maximum of mind. But it is well to remember that Channing had been athletic, joyous, springy and gay, manly and bold to a fault in physical courage in his boyhood and college days; that there was never any other asceticism, or melancholy, or otherworldliness about him than necessarily belong to invalids who have to study their health continually; and that, if his poor physique compelled him to live a good deal in solitude, to avoid too much exertion in any form, and to fix his mind upon his special pursuit, it never took any robustness from his courage, dignity from his manhood, sympathy from his

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love of children, the open air, nature, and womanhood. There is no ill-health in his lusty hopes of humanity, in his unvaletudinarian admiration for those who could defy and resist wrong and oppression, blind custom, or tyrannical use and wont. His love of the beaches of your island in the time of storms, where he said he felt his soul expand and take on the power of the elemental strife, should teach us how little the softness of his tissue or the worn fibres of his muscles communicated their weakness to the cords of his intellectual or his moral nature. In fact his soul would have animated a giant, and set forth a Viking, in its magnificent courage and sweep of life.

I am struck with nothing more than the comprehensive grasp of his thoughts. They bind God and man together, the past and the future; and, high and holy as they are wide and deep, they are never filmy and airy; always solid, ready to bear the tread of the strongest reason; full of sense, if full of light; enthusiastic, but never eccentric, never wild. His feet are steady on the ground, if his eye and arm are reaching for the skies.

He had been addicted to reverie, as all ideal natures are, in his earlier manhood; but the mist quickly consolidated into a cloud, out of which shot bolts of prodigious force and directness. His greatest, most distinctive gift—his instrument and his method alike—was the power of an almost unequaled concentration of attention upon his own thoughts and inward experiences, afterwards enlarged into the faculty of fixing his mind, with an absorbing exclusion of other themes, upon any subject he chose to meditate and examine. He brooded, with a patience that nature does not equal in her winged kind, over the seminal suggestions he found in the sacred nest of his own soul. Other men have had his thoughts; nay, happily, they are so native to humanity, that they must always lack originality. It was what they grew to, under his prolonged, persistent meditation, that made them new, and other, and more fruitful than they have proved in kindred minds lacking his unwearied and fixed

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power and habit of contemplation. This, too, is the source of the monotony, of which some complain in his writings. There is not room enough in the mind for the concurrent and full expansion of many ideas, as important and sublime as those that occupied his great soul. A few master thoughts —the greatest that can employ the human soul—had early fastened his attention; they never ceased to yield new fruits to meditation.* He never got to the end of them, or was fully content with the expression he gave them. He returns to them again and again. He applies them. They are always as useful as they are engaging; always as much the ground of his action, as of his feeling. They are thoughts of God, of man, of freedom, of holiness, of public justice, of the elevation of the humble, of the enrichment of the poor! They are not thoughts to amuse, to please, to dazzle; thoughts for a cultivated class, or a fastidious appetite; thoughts whose aim is to show off the thinker's skill, or taste, or originality; they are not clothed in rhetoric, nor made to suit the love of variety. They can hardly be said to be *chosen* thoughts, but rather thoughts so self-urged and spontaneous that they seem the special hardy natives of the soil, too vigorous and too exhausting of the sap to allow any lesser thoughts, or any variety of thoughts, to spring up in the neighborhood. The solemn pause and measured formality with which in his writings he announces his passing from one to another thought, exhibits and illustrates the awe with which he was himself overcome in the presence of his convictions. They hardly seemed his own, and he introduced them as if he were presenting the lofty ambassadors of some sacred power, for the obeisance of the company met

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* Mr. Browning, in his Paracelsus, describes this experience:

> "So that when quailing at the mighty range
> Of secret truths which yearn for birth, I haste
> To contemplate undazzled some one truth,
> Its bearings and effects alone—at once
> What was a speck expands into a star,
> Asking a life to pass exploring thus."

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to receive them. It is the greatness and glory of only the rarest souls, to be thus filled with a few themes, that claim and crowd all the room our nature has—thoughts so exalted, so peerless, and so self-sustained that they neither allow nor require any train-bearers or attendants. Channing did not lack native versatility, aptness for many things, taste and capacity for literature, philosophy, science, art, poetry, practical affairs, politics, statesmanship, natural history, society; that he was capable of wit, satire, humor, is evident enough to those who make a study of his biography—almost an autobiography—by the hand of his favorite nephew. It was no lack of nice observation, of practical interest in daily life, of sympathy with common things, of physical sensibility or even manly passion, that made him such a uniform or one-keyed organ of a few great thoughts. It is as plain as light that he was no mystic, no mere temperamental saint, no vestal in disguise—not even a man to whom evil was unknown and the world naturally repulsive, and therefore carefully veiled from sight. He had none of the scholar's learned ignorance, the saint's pious inhumanity, the devotee's upturned eyeballs. There was in the odor of his sanctity no savor of any ecclesiastical herbs, no artificial, sickly perfume of funeral tuberoses, rosemary and myrrh. His seriousness was habitual, and caused by the essential solemnity of his thoughts. He did not often smile and seldom laughed; but it was not from want of cheerfulness or incapacity for humor, but only from the prepossession of his mind by grave and intensely interesting themes. He thought himself one of the happiest of men, and his children testify to the vivacity and cheerfulness of his domestic life. But he was made happy, and happier every year he lived, by his greater realization of our wonderful nature, and its relations to its generous and glorious source, his high and cheerful views of human progress on earth, and its sublime destiny beyond the skies.

It was a grand peculiarity of this great man, so to have reconciled his ideas with his immediate life and duty, that his life was his religion, and his religion his life. He did not

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wear his faith and piety as a professional robe—it was his home attire and his working dress. He did not keep his thoughts for meditation, except as far as meditation is itself life and action, but for use and application. He could not be caught in undress. He was the same exalted person, at home and abroad, in ordinary conversation and in the pulpit. Indeed, Dr. Dewey—whose testimony comes nearer to that of a *peer*, though his is a different variety of the order of greatness, than that of any close witness of Channing—has told me, that his talk was greater, and more exhaustive and exhausting, than his writings or his preaching; upon the same themes, just as lofty and just as grave, but more prolonged and more glowing. In short, the nearer you got to this burning and shining light, the more you found it to be not painted flame, but real fire; not light only, but heat. It went far to consume Channing himself who lay a live coal upon the altar, and it was apt to scorch and shrivel even the stoutest souls that stood near it while it steadily burnt, not out, but on. It was the utter genuineness of his faith, the power it had over himself, that made it so effectual over others, and gives it such might to-day.

Of his preaching, I was myself the glad and fortunate beneficiary, and am among the not too many living witnesses to its transcendent power! There is no spot in Boston so sacred to me as the profaned site of the old Federal Street Church; for thither, a youth of twenty-one, I was wont to repair (and it was a walk of several miles) every other Sunday morning, for two critical years of my life and theological studies, to hear Channing preach! There were excellent preachers to be heard much nearer home; but there was that in Channing's mind and soul, in his voice, manner, and look, that separated him from them, as the prophet is separated from the priest. Indeed he did *not preach* in the ordinary sense of the word. Gowned as he was, and obedient to all the decorums of the pulpit, it was not the preacher, but the apostle, you saw and heard! Even in the pulpit he lived the things he saw and said! The greatness of human nature

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shone in his beautiful brow, sculptured with thought, and lighted from within; his eye, so full and blue, was lustrous with a vision of God, and seemed almost an open door into the shining presence. His voice, sweet, round, unstrained, full, though low, lingered as if with awed delay upon the words that articulated his dearest thoughts, and trembled with an ever-restrained, but most contagious emotion. He was intensely present in his thoughts, as if just born from his soul, and dressed from his lips, although he usually (always in my experience) spoke from a manuscript. But while his individuality was inexpressibly commanding, it gave no suggestion of the love of personal influence. He used the word I with the freedom of the Master, but it conveyed the sense, "not I, but the Father in me; not I, but the truth I speak; and not you, but the nature you represent; not you, but humanity and God in you and in us!" He rose slowly, read a hymn, and began his discourse (for seldom in my day was he able to spare much of his strength for the preliminary services, conducted by his colleague) on a plane so level to the feet of the simplest of his hearers, that few noticed the difficulty of the slow but steady ascent he always made, carrying his wrapt hearers with him by the power of his thought, the calm insistance of his conviction, and the solemn earnestness of his spirit, until they found themselves standing at a height from which visions of Divine things, in their true proportions and real perspective, became easy and spontaneous. There was no muscular strain or contortion in his limbs or face or voice; no excitement of a fleshly origin; no false fervor or false emphasis; no loss of perfect dignity and self-possession. And there was little in the *words* themselves to fix attention, except their purity and grace. It was the subject that came forward and remained in the memory. He left you not thinking of him, nor of his rhetoric. He had no startling figures, no brilliant fancies, no sharp points; little for admiration or praise; everything for reflection, for inspiration, and for illumination. There was one other peculiarity in his preaching. He

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preached only on great themes, and this made his sermons always timely, for great subjects are ever in order. So profoundly helpful, so inspiring was his preaching, that I, for one, lived on it, from fortnight to fortnight, and went to it every time, with the expectation and the experience of receiving the bread of heaven on which I was to live and grow, until the manna fell again; and men of all ages had much the same feeling. When, for the first time, I saw Channing out of the pulpit, I was as much surprised at his diminutive form as if, expecting a giant, I had met a dwarf! He had seemed to me a large and tall man in his pulpit; but I soon found that, slight and low as his frame was, nearness and familiarity took nothing from its dignity, and suggested nothing fragile or weak. Indeed his attenuated and lowly figure really increased the sense of his moral majesty and intellectual eminence. His presence was more awful, simple and gentle as he was, than that of any human being I ever saw. It forbade familiarity, silenced garrulity, checked ease, and had something of the effect of a supernatural visitor; awing levity, and making even common speech, or speech at all, difficult! He was so unconscious of this effect, so little willing to produce it, so anxious to make others free and communicative, that it became pathetic to witness the paralysis of tongue and motion that usually fell on those whom he in vain tried to set at liberty from his overpowering personality. Doubtless there were familiar and domestic friends, and perhaps men who had grown up with him, that escaped this awe, and overcame this distance, and children did not seem to feel it; but just in proportion to the sense and sensibility of young men and women was it irresistible.

I have said that Channing was not the kind of preacher Boston usually made and welcomed. Fortunately he did not settle, of choice, in a congregation most characteristic of Boston—not in Brattle Street, where he was called, but in Federal Street—then comparatively inconspicuous—and so he made, by degrees, out of a less fixed and wool-dyed class of citizens, a congregation of his own, to which he com-

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municated much of his own spirit and something of his own views. But it was in his character of philanthropist that he had most to do with shaping a new Boston, and most to contend with, and there his personal courage and commanding individuality were most displayed. I must not go at length into the history of his relations to the politics, the pauperism, the anti-slavery agitation, the questions of free speech and free opinion, which are really the places where his character and even his views are best illustrated. But I should wholly fail in the completeness even of an outline of Channing, if I did not trace the line of his course upon these public questions.

Everybody knows how much of Channing's mind and heart, courage and inspiration went into the application of his views—God's glorious purpose in man's creation, the dignity of human nature and the sacredness of freedom, of will, thought, speech and conduct—to the working institutions of government, of business, of charity, of domestic life. He was above all things a *man*, and then only a minister, and no zeal or fidelity to his profession, incompatible with or overriding his duties as a man, could have satisfied him. Indeed, a Christian minister in his eyes was only a man, realizing under Christ's teaching the full dignity of humanity, and working for its rights and its development in the sphere of our present existence. Any effort to shut him up in the pulpit or within the clerical profession, or to cut off his right, his duty, his opportunity of making his moral and spiritual convictions forces in society at large, would necessarily have been unavailing. He knew no distinction between his manhood and his ministry, and accepted no rules as binding on him which were not binding on all. His field was the world, his congregation the human race; his office an ordination to advance, protect and serve all the higher interests of his kind. There was nothing strictly new in this position. All the noblest and greatest men have been distinguished by a certain refusal to observe conventional bounds, or to make their special profession or calling less

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than that of servant of all truth and all good. Some of the greatest poets have been also theologians; great lawyers, publicists; and great physicians, philanthropists; great artists, thinkers and reformers. New England never lacked men in the ministry who felt it their right and duty to guide and watch over political sentiment, and Boston had had her Chauncy and Mayhew, not to speak of her Eliot and Mathers. But in ordinary times the tendency of all professions is to become special, and to have an ethics each of its own. Unprofessional, unclerical, are words of significant meaning. No doubt, too, there is a wholesome instinct which teaches men that every profession is a jealous mistress, and demands the exclusive use of the time and talents of its followers, and that a division of labor and a certain mental and moral uniform peculiar to each, best favor the interest of all. Departure from this practical rule is only justified when those who break it are clearly seen to be men of exceptional greatness and competency to larger influence and larger work than belong to any one calling in life. Channing was such a man—a philosopher, a philanthropist, a statesman, a poet—nothing less than the general condition and prospects of the whole race could engage his attention, or limit his sense of responsibleness. He was accordingly an observer and student of other countries and their moral, social and political prospects. He was deeply interested in all experiments for increasing popular intelligence, improving the condition of the poor, or widening political rights. He understood the relations and influence of men and events across national boundaries. The French, the English, the German influence upon humanity and the fortunes of Christianity, closely concerned him, at a time when few could see over the fences, which, however they narrow the view, do not prevent the circulation of a common human atmosphere. And in the same way he was profoundly interested, at a time when it was rare, in the mutual relations of the different classes of society. Singularly tempted to devote himself to his own excellent and fortunate class—refined, decorous,

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solid and satisfied, and all the more tempted by the fact that his profession justified and expected a certain confinement within parochial bounds—he could not limit his views or his sympathies or his obligation within any class lines. He reverted to the original office of the ministry when men were not settled over congregations, but sent forth apostles of truth and mercy to all men. And although he was precluded, by his want of health, from active missionary or active public labors, and lived a peculiarly settled and uniform life, his mind, his heart traveled widely, and his pen was a missionary and a public servant that recognized the claims of the whole world. Few men in this country or any other have been as universal in their survey, their aims, their breadth of view, and the comprehensiveness of their purposes, as Channing. With the tastes and habits of a recluse, he was mentally a cosmopolite and a publicist. The least of a partisan and a politician, he had all the feelings and all the capacity of a statesman. Limited by his physical fragility to a narrow walk of personal observation and intercourse, he went in spirit and by the aid of his intellectual and moral sympathies into the homes and shops and fields, and felt the closest and warmest interest in the trials, sorrows, wrongs and exposures of the common people, and especially those most overlooked. Tuckerman, his most intimate friend, the apostle to the poor of Boston, found in no one so patient and so helpful a supporter and admirer as Channing, who envied his skill, his success, and his delight in this gracious service. His advice and his encouragement to the laboring classes, which reached many countries, drew forth expressions of gratitude that gave Channing more satisfaction than he could receive from the admiration of literary critics, or the crowds of cultivated people that hung on his lips. The ministry to the poor in Boston owed most of its permanent interest to his direction and encouragement. He was profoundly concerned for the elevation, the happiness, the substantial good of the humbler ranks of people. It was not a professional, technical inter-

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est of the ordinary ministerial kind, lest their souls should be lost, but a sad sense of what they were losing in not knowing, serving and loving God.

There were none of the materials for a fanatic in Channing; and yet fanatics have seldom gone as far in their madness or narrowness of view, as Channing went in his sobriety and comprehensiveness. He hoped and expected more of all men than perfectionists, socialists, and idealogists have looked for and demanded, but he had the most practical sense of the difficulties in the way. He had the patience of God and geologic time with the slowness of the advance. Nobody could have told him much about the obstructions and trying conditions, under the sense of which most men give up the problem. He was hopeful in full view of all obstacles, and active and earnest in spite of his knowledge how long and how much action and effort would be required for an indefinite time to come.

His course in regard to the anti-slavery movement is perhaps the best illustration of his character as a humanitarian and a citizen. By position, by taste, and by associates, he was one of the men likely to feel most what was called the violence, the narrowness, and the vulgarity of that movement, as it first presented itself in Massachusetts. Its starters and supporters outraged the taste, the ethics, the customs of the best people. It looked wild, fierce, revolutionary, impious, much as the earliest pretensions of Christianity must have seemed to devout and influential Jews in the holy city. As a rule, Christian ministers gave a wide berth to its advocates. Channing regarded it doubtless with distaste, and turned a cold shoulder upon its first apostles, from genuine doubts of its being in right hands, or advocated in a legal and Christian way. In this, he only exhibited the uniform caution of his conscientious mind, which never allowed itself to be swept off the base of its own solid judgment. It was always his judgment—which was his conscience—that had to be set on fire, not his feelings, and it did not catch pre-

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maturely, and when it did, it burnt with a flame that could not be quenched.

When Channing began—and it was far earlier than any of the sober and weighty minds about him—to see and feel what was involved in the anti-slavery cause; what this fierce indignation was; the cry of outraged justice and down-trampled humanity; what a holy sense of wrong done to the human soul lay at the bottom of the wrath that made religious, social, and political conventionalities, so far as they condoned or supported slavery, objects of anger and derision; he transferred his sympathies from the conservative and popular side of Boston taste and feeling to the radical, the unpopular, the odious side of the anti-slavery reformers. I do not think he *counted* the cost of this, or of any course he ever took, but he knew as well as any man the way in which it would be received by his friends and lovers. His difficulties were never those of the politician, the sectarian, or the time-server. His slowness was always his desire to be right with God and his conscience; his quickness, the zeal he had in the service of truth and duty, the moment he knew them. What services he rendered to the anti-slavery cause; what he did to clarify, exalt, and make possible, the views that afterwards became acceptable and potent, the world knows, and abolitionists concede. But he never would or could join any organization that compromised his least conviction, or controlled his own sense of a Divine policy. He spoke for himself; he stood for himself. He had neither the concurrence of the conservatives nor the radicals. He offended the abolitionists; he disgusted the whigs; he pleased only God and his own conscience, and served the great cause of freedom with transcendent power, because his devotion to it was neither fanatical, partial, nor local, and what he wrote on anti-slavery is true for all time. His anti-slavery was a logical and moral consequent of his reverence for human nature.

Channing's course in regard to the trial of Abner Kneeland for atheism was an equal illustration of his faith in the

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self-protecting power of the truth, and the safety of freedom of opinion and expression. It required immense moral courage to head the petition which he also wrote for his release from prison and punishment. But, in the community, in all the world, where public opinion is most worth attending to, because rarely impulsive or extravagant, Channing had, many times in his life, to confront it with protests or resistance, which left him open to all sorts of suspicion in the very places where his reputation was most valuable, his piety, his faith, and his scrupulosity. He kept the company of publicans and sinners; like his Master, he could not judge those universally condemned. His moral courage—because it had no conceit, no superficial passion, no partisan fire in it —was truly sublime. His only cowardice was the rare and honorable fear of being left alone with an accusing conscience.

And here, to draw these dim outlines of Channing's views and character to a period—let me crown all, by saying that self-reverence was, after all, his most characteristic and his central grace and quality! No praise, no sympathy, no concurrence was essential to his peace; but the approval of his own soul he must have at all hazards, and at every sacrifice. He guarded himself at every door from what might betray his purity of motive, his rectitude of will, his moral freedom. To be and not to seem; to be himself what he demanded and urged others to become; to be just, charitable, hopeful, submissive; to be like Jesus, and like what he believed God to be, in spirit and in truth; this was the never-failing purpose and plan of his life! Nothing could he do that compromised this holy necessity of being true to God and himself. He could not go one step over the limits his fastidious purity prescribed, nor one step back from the path where his conscience beckoned him on, to disaffront his best friends, or to disabuse his most powerful censors. And with all his publicity, and his wide sphere of fame and influence, he lived with God almost as in the seclusion of a hermit's cell, as free from worldly ambition as if he were the lowliest of

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his kind; as womanly in his purity, as if not the most manly of men; as childlike as if he had not the experience, the wisdom, the strength of the ripest maturity, and the duties and opportunities of a statesman, a great citizen, a leader of his time, and the foremost in the ranks of liberal spirits.

I have not attempted a biography of Channing, nor followed his life in detail, nor quoted his words. No later work of that sort can supersede the precious autobiography which his nephew has skillfully extracted from his journals, letters and sermons. It is too serious, too spiritual, too much in essence, and too little in detail, too bulky and yet too monotonous, to be easy or popular reading, though a dozen American and perhaps as many English editions of it have been circulated. But it is immortal in its substance, and can never cease to be new and fresh in its influence, as human souls rise to the level where its sublime simplicity and searching spirituality become visible. It is a work to be put upon the shelf or table of the private closet, in the small class of permanent devotional helps, into no page of which can any docile heart dip without finding a baptism of the Holy Spirit. Would it were read and studied more. I can name no work which ministers of religion, and especially our own, could consult and feed upon with more profit to their souls and the souls of those they teach. It is encouraging to know that Channing's works and his memoirs have, if not the immense circulation they merit, a wide, a constant, an increasing currency among all sects, and especially among the ministers of all sects; that they are translated into the chief tongues of the world, and are revered and honored by all who are capable of appreciating their calm, deep, unpartisan, permanent, and changeless truth and piety.

I should not have presumed, however, to make this discourse so long and full, had I not a painful feeling that Channing, after all the exaltation connected with his name, and the settled canonization of his character, is really, to a marked degree, neglected and unread and unappreciated among those who owe him most, and who should be best

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acquainted with his writings, his views and his characteristics. I often hear men, who owe no small part of their own liberty and spiritual life to his inspiration, say they do not, nay, cannot *read* him; and then I feel somewhat the same regret and surprise with which I hear others say they cannot enjoy the Bible. I confess that Channing saturated his more docile hearers and disciples, in his lifetime, with his views and his temper, and that some of them have that surcharged filiality, which sometimes makes children find the best fathers less stimulating society than much less able and worthy men, not so familiar and congenital. But I am confident that this influence has at length become a forgetfulness and an ignorance of the man and his opinions, and has passed over from those who once knew him well and have neglected the care of his memory, to a generation that did not know him, and do not seem to care to know him, since those who did, seem so lukewarm, or so careless, to preserve his present fame and influence. If I do not, in the strength of my reverence and gratitude, overstate this neglect, it is a deplorable one. For nothing can be less true than any notion that Channing was overrated by his immediate contemporaries, his fellow ministers, his townsmen, or his disciples. The reverse of this is nearer the truth. Nor is he duly estimated, great as his fame is to-day. His is still the morning-star, and is climbing the sky. He has not been outshone; he has not been superseded. No great spiritual light, of a strictly human kind, ever had greater, denser fogs of prejudice to encounter, or could oppose to them a milder flame. Still, his star is one held baleful by millions of good Christians. His light waits a purer air, a clearer and more rational sky, a freer humanity, to show its full glory. But it is steady, and its oil does not fail, nor its beams flicker. Long after names more popular and commanding have faded out of human memory, his name will be reviving with new splendor. There is in him and his works little to decay, little to correct or change, and there is nothing to excuse or to explain away. His

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language has no false rhetoric, no pretense, no tiresome tricks or shallow music. He was an artist, but one who never left the mark of his tools on his work. Perhaps he fed the midnight lamp with oil, but it never spilt upon his page or scented his ink. He touched nothing trivial, local, or passing; his themes are always great, his treatment always majestic. He has not mixed the temporary and the permanent, feet of clay with thighs of brass and head of gold. He is always high, always in earnest, always careful, clean, and precise, self-consistent and full of reverence for truth, for God, for man, and for himself.

Those who think such a soul, and such a thinker and spiritual force can pass by, can be repeated and improved upon, superseded and displaced, outgrown and outshined, are dull observers of the permanent place which such rare spirits hold in the uncrowded meridian, where their stars shine together forever. Religious genius is God's rarest inspiration and least common gift in any transcendent form. If we haunt and search the remotest antiquity to find and to sit at the feet of poets, artists, sages, and hang our freshest wreaths upon the spectral brows of shades whose personal history is unknown, when will the day come that St. Augustine, Borromeo, a-Kempis, Fénélon, and Guion, Bossuet, Taylor, and Butler, and Channing are to be esteemed less than ever fresh fonts of Divine inspiration? Channing belongs to the Church Universal and for all time. But he had an American birthplace, near the sea that unites all, and in a place that is more and more frequented and cosmopolitan. It is fit that on this spot his eternal memory should have its monument. Catholic, and all the more Catholic, because Unitarian, he must always wear the Unity of God, not in its vulgar sense, but in its spiritual significance, as the central jewel in his coronet of shining doctrines. He suffered for his testimony to this concealed, neglected, or perverted "Simplicity of Christ," and his disciples and fellow Christians would be ungrateful to forget that they owe him special devotion, and the devotion of publishing and proclaiming

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him, all the more because his fidelity to them cost him dear, and took him out of the general ranks of Christendom to be their conscript soldier. He was a cosmopolite, but he was none the less a thorough American, and the genius of America possessed him; the hopefulness, the progressiveness, the freshness, the courage and unconventionality of the new hemisphere. He belonged in a new world, a democratic State, a country with an ample horizon. He was born by the sea, he died in the mountains. He was bred in the country, he lived in the city, he passed away in a place that knew him not, in the heart of the most American of American States, and on a journey. These things are typical. He belonged in no one place, and his spirit and influence are national, and still on a journey. The sea and the mountains claim him. Places he knew not have a sacred interest in his history. I believe the nation will some day, remembering his physical birth in Rhode Island, his spiritual birth in Virginia, his life work in Massachusetts, his death in Vermont, his relations to the most significant reformation and revolution in religious life, because a thorough reversal of base in the whole order of theology, will place his monument in the Capitol, as the only place central enough to express his national significance. But it will not be until his name and place as the greatest of American prophets is fully recognized. And that will come when the candid study of his works and his life shall show with universal consent, that although a generation or two in advance of his time, he proclaimed and illustrated the kind of religion, the form of Christianity, which is alone adapted to a universal spread, and destined to become a universal leaven, and the true Bread of Life to the American people; and that what is permanently their faith is sure at last to be the faith of the whole world. So high, so wide, so deep is the claim of WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING.

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